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# State Archives and the Maine State Cultural Building

Samual S. Silsby Jr.  
*Maine State Archives*

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STATE ARCHIVES AND THE MAINE STATE CULTURAL BUILDING

Speech at  
Annual Meeting  
of the

Maine Society of the Daughters of the American Colonists

Thursday Afternoon, November 3, 1966

Monmouth Academy, Monmouth, Maine

by

Samuel S. Silsby, Jr., State Archivist

The records management and archives law establishing the Maine State Archives is intended to achieve a more economical and efficient administration of current State records as well as provide for preservation of its noncurrent records of permanent value.

Because most of you are aware that one of the three referendum questions which will appear on the November 8 ballot will be approval of a Maine State Cultural Building which will house a State Library, Archives and Museum, I think it would be well worth while to consider some of the facts concerning the archives program and its need for the facilities provided by such a building.

This is my purpose in speaking to you today--to discuss some of

the practical aspects involved in implementing the administrative features of the records management and archives law and what will ultimately be necessary to realize the full potential of the program.

What are "archives?"

First the noncurrent or inactive records of public or private institutions of permanent value;

Second, the place where they are stored; and

Third, the agency which is responsible for preserving them.

The Maine State Archives, as the official agency of the State, has been in operation since July 5, 1966. The law creating the agency , because of the constitutional responsibility of the Secretary of State, requires that the appointment of the State Archivist be made by the Secretary of State, but in all other respects imposes the responsibility for the archives and records management program squarely upon the shoulders of the State Archivist. An Archives Advisory Board is established to advise the State Archivist, consisting of 6 interested persons appointed by the Governor and 5 State officers who serve as es officio members. The law establishing the program has been acclaimed by some of the foremost experts in the country as one of the most advanced in the field

of archival and records management planning.

In accordance with the standards for State archival operations of the Society of the American Archivists, the law sanctions a number of program activities in which the Maine State Archives must ultimately engage if it is to fulfill the purpose for which it was established. These include, but are in no way limited to, such activities as:

1. Records inventory and preparation of retention and disposal schedules.
2. Weeding and processing records preparatory to their transfer to the archives.
3. Destruction of records of no archival value.
4. Establishing standards, procedures and techniques for effective records management, based upon continuing surveys of paper-work operations, with recommendations for improved use of space, equipment and supplies employed in creating, maintaining and servicing records.
5. Receiving, processing and accessioning State and private records; preparation of finding aids.
6. Preservation and rehabilitation of records, including repairs, binding and lamination services.

7. Photographic reproduction, including photographic copies and microfilming of essential State records.
8. Reference services, including mail inquiries, research and making material available for public use.
9. Advice and assistance to the legislative and judicial branches of the State, counties and municipalities concerning the preservation of their records.
10. Publications.

Obviously, with its limited resources, the Maine State Archives lacks the present ability to undertake many of the important program activities contemplated under the records management and archives law. The weight of administrative effort between archive and records management provisions, until such time as appropriate facilities, equipment and staff become available, necessarily means a greater emphasis on the records management features of the program. The initial phase is presently underway. Specifically, we are gathering whatever descriptive information we can concerning the purposes, functions and operations of each existing State agency. The various agencies have each been furnished with copies of the law and have been individually contacted by letter in order to explain the program

and to obtain their cooperation and support in completing a brief questionnaire on the records management phase of the program. Their compliance in furnishing the information and materials requested has far exceeded our expectations, and, as a result of our request for the designation of a records officer for each agency, we have a file of available officials to contact for further information concerning the paper work operations of the various agencies.

Previous surveys of the State government operations, such as those by the Public Administration Service in 1956, the Citizens' State Government Committee in 1952, the National Institute of Public Administration in 1930, as well as various pilot studies authorized by the Legislature, have been broken down for a considerable amount of detail concerning the administrative functioning of each agency. The use of the extensive catalogue and vertical file material kept by the Maine State Library on the State agencies and their publications has been made available to the Maine State Archives on a copy basis, which, in addition to the many other resources that it has, will greatly assist this particular phase of operation. Several agencies

such as the Department of Finance and Administration and Department of Audit, have been extremely helpful in furnishing hard to obtain material, and even the current study of State personnel by professional consultants for the Legislative Research Committee has provided excellent, up-to-date organization charts for each State agency.

The material developed on each State agency will form a master file which will be continuously revised and used to provide a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date description of the functions and organization of each agency. The completeness of such descriptive information is a necessary condition to an effective records management program and an essential prerequisite in the initial identification, inventory and estimation of the quantity of current and noncurrent records of each agency, including the estimated accumulation of active records and how long each series is needed for current use. The orderly accessioning of the noncurrent, permanently valuable records of the State will depend upon the completeness of such information and consequent effectiveness of the retention and disposal schedules established. The necessity of relating the

various groups or series of records to the agencies which produced them will require a substantial amount of research into the administrative history of the State to develop comparable descriptive material for the now non-existent State agencies.

If the recent survey made by the Archives Advisory Board is reasonably accurate, the State has at least 40,000 cubic feet of inactive records scattered among some 50 State agencies. On the ratio of 2 cubic feet per legal size file drawer or 8 cubic feet for each 4 drawer legal file, this material would fill 50,000 such files. The material, as it is, is distributed over a wide number of locations, either in the various State offices where it takes up valuable work space or stored in inadequate and inaccessible areas, such as the unlamented elevator shaft, the Vickery-Hill Building or the powder houses at the Augusta State Hospital. The evaluation and disposition of this 146 year old assortment of archival and nonarchival material will obviously present many problems until adequate space is available for physically relocating the materials worth saving. The fact that most of the accumulation is held by existing State agencies, or is at least under their jurisdiction, should ease the task of separating some



of the archival material out, if for no other reason than on the basis of the limited inventories taken by the agencies themselves, or upon the basis of more comprehensive surveys, such as the one completed by Professor Allan Johnson of Bowdoin College in 1908.

The obvious and most practical solution to gain control over the accumulation is to begin an immediate, active operation to destroy that portion of the material having no archival value, thereby probably substantially reducing the quantity which will ultimately require housing in the archives.

The experience of the now defunct Committee on the Destruction of Old Records during the twenty year period it was in operation will be expecially helpful in formulating policies and regulations to govern the function. Temporarily at least, its regulations will probably be reinstated until there has been sufficient time to study the problem and devise what procedures and regulations will be necessary.

While very little can be done in physically relocating archival material, except in extreme situations, there is much that can be done to retire important records such as the Journals of the House, Senate

and Executive Council from active use through microfilming. Arrangements with the Division of Research and Vital Records of the Department of Health and Welfare will make the use of its microfilming equipment available for this purpose at a fraction of the cost if it were done on a contractual basis outside. The film copy will be made available for viewing on the recordak at the Maine State Library until the Maine State Archives can provide the service. Other areas of possible activity in the program are apparent in the rehabilitation of archival records which could be immediately undertaken on a priority basis when funds are available. Reference services, including mail inquiries, research and making material available for use, are being provided within the limits of available staff time, though inquiries for extensive genealogical research have had to be referred to professional genealogists working in the immediate area. There are several worth while publications which suggest themselves in considering what the Maine State Archives can do in this area. The fact that much of the material necessary for compiling a first class State government manual will be available in the archives files makes this a project

well worth considering, not to mention the need for a carefully compiled directory of State and county officers.

The Maine State Archives, at the request of the Secretary of State, has assumed responsibility for the publication of the administrative procedures code which will incorporate the rules and regulations issued by the various State agencies into a single publication. The Federal Register issued by the National Archives and Records Service is a similar publication.

The need for a State archival agency to have both published as well as unpublished material of each State agency available has prompted the Maine State Archives to make arrangements with each agency to receive their publications as issued, and with the Maine State Library for the earlier ones which it can supply. By beginning now, the Maine State Archives will be in a better position to make the material available when research facilities become available.

At the present time, the facilities of the Maine State Archives consist of one office on a second floor balcony over the corporation

division in the Secretary of State's office. The archives has access to the elevator vault on the second floor of the State House, Vault "C", so-called, immediately below it on the first floor, and to a basement room on the first floor where the legislative journals and various records of the Executive Council are stored. The Maine State Archives, as such, has no vault or storage space of its own, and with little chance that it will pick up any available space in the immediate future.

The problem of housing the Maine State Archives has been carefully considered by the Archives Advisory Board and Museum Study Committee of the 102nd Legislature. The archives facilities incorporated into the proposed Maine State Cultural Building are based on realistic estimates of the space required for an archival operation provided by Dr. James B. Rhoads, the Deputy Archivist of the United States, who acted as a consultant to the Board. The detailed space requirements which he developed were included with similar requirements supplied by the Maine State Library and Museum consultants to arrive at overall space estimates for the Maine State Cultural Building.

The archives facilities contained in the proposed building includes appropriate space allocations for each specific function necessary in processing the work flow of the Maine State Archives, including a Receiving Room, a Preparation Room, a Photoreproduction and Restoring Area, a Stack Area, a Vault, a Search Room, and an Administrative Area. The following comments prepared by the Archives Advisory Board describe the part which each of these facilities plays in the archival work flow:

"Records commonly arrive at the archives by truck and are transferred at once to the Receiving Room, shared with the Library and Museum, for sorting and any cleaning or fumigation necessary for immediate preservation. The records are then sent to the adjacent Preparation Room, where documentary experts enter their arrival in the archives file, prepare catalogue descriptions of them, and box and label them for shelving. Upon their arrival, or at a latter date, records may need repair, or it may be necessary to make photocopies of them. These operations are carried out by specially trained personnel in the Photoreproduction and Restoring Area, which is equipped with such

devices as laminating machines (for strengthening fragile documents) and microfilm cameras. Photoreproduction facilities will be shared with the Library and Museum.

After processing, records are stored in what is by far the largest part of the archives, the Stack Area. For convenience this area must be centrally located, and for maximum protection for the documents, it must have fire-resistant doors, protection against infrared and ultra-violet rays, and proper temperature and humidity controls.

In the proposed Cultural Building, the Stack area will consist of three tiers of metal shelving piled one on top of the other to save floor space. In or near the stacks, there will be a maximum security vault for especially valuable material, such as Maine's priceless Constitution of 1820. Each of the three agencies in the Cultural Building will have exclusive access to its own vault area, but the three will be housed in one common vault structure.

The archives facility must serve people as well as documents. The Search Room where members of the public may use archival materials will be located adjacent to the stacks. The room will be provided

with a special alcove for the use of microfilm readers. Working space for archives employees, also located near the stack area, will include a private office for the Archivist, a secretarial room, a general office room, and a private office for the chief assistant. Desk space for various technicians will also be provided in the stack area.

The "intent and content" prepared by the Attorney General to explain the bond issue for the Cultural Building, after briefly describing the purposes, concludes with this paragraph:

The State Treasurer is authorized under the direction of the State Cultural Building Authority, with approval of the Governor and Council, to issue bonds maturing not later than 40 years in an amount not exceeding \$4,800,000.00 for the purposes stated above.

Everything being equal, it seems improbable that any

bonds will be issued, if the Building is approved, before 1967; and if the entire 40 year period is required to retire them, the financing of the Building will be completed by 2007. The financing involved for this project ranks very small in comparison with the financial effort of the State of Maine for education during the present decade. The advances forecast for the year 2000 in every field of human endeavor will require the best

we can provide to meet the challenges of a fiercely competitive world.

The significance of the bond issue for the Library-Archives-Museum

Building in ratio to the contribution it will make during this period

makes it unquestionably the best investment the people of this State

have ever been called upon to approve.

The future of the Maine State Archives, as a State institution, is of vital consequence to the people of Maine which, in the last analysis, will be determined by their opinion. The interest shown in the enactment of the archives and records management law has been exceptional, but regardless how well intentioned, an administrative agency is no more effective than the appropriations and public support it receives. The interests of the Maine State Archives require adequate space and staff to realize the full potential of the archives and records management law. The approval of the proposed Maine State Cultural Building on November 8 will inaugurate a new era of achievement and service to the people of Maine and provide the Maine State Archives with an opportunity of making the benefits of the archives and records management law a reality.